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ABSTRACT

The experiment described in this report investigates two basic questions concerning beginning reading instruction to speakers of nonstandard dialects. 1--Will learning to read be facilitated if the primary reading material is phrased in the actual word patterns and grammatical structure used by the children in their oral speech? 2--Will learning the same story rephrased in speech patterns corresponding to standard English usage be facilitated if the children first learn to read the story phrased in the word patterns and grammatical structure corresponding to their oral speech? Using the concepts of "everyday talk" and "school talk" with special emphasis on the verb-usage differences between the two, an experimental class was conducted with the above questions in mind. Results of tests administered to the experimental group and the control group show that there is a definite trend in favor of the experimental group. The experimental reading program encourages the teacher to respect and accept the children's established dialect while at the same time providing a framework to help the children learn to read, gradually and systematically using standard English in their oral language activities. For additional information, see FL 002 946. (Author/VM)

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Language Development and Reading

DIALECTAL READERS - RATIONALE, USE, AND VALUE

The research conducted in Chicago from 1965 to 1970[1] was to obtain information with respect to two questions:

1) Will learning to read be facilitated for children whose dialect differs from the standard dialect if the primary reading material is phrased in the actual word patterns and grammatical structure used by the children in their oral speech?

2). Will learning the same story rephrased in speech patterns corresponding to standard English usage be facilitated if the children first learn to read the story phrased in the word patterns and grammatical structure corresponding to their oral speech? (Leaverton, 1965)

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[1]The research described in this paper has been cooperatively supported since 1965 by the Gifted Program Development Section, Department for Exceptional Children, State of Illinois and the Chicago Board of Education

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I would like to stress at the onset of this presentation that the objective of the research was not to develop a particular, fixed set of materials, but instead, to test an approach or model that from a psychological point of view seemed to have merit.

Theoretical rationale of study

The theoretical rationale of the study is based on the following conditions that are felt to be crucial to the learning process involved in beginning reading.

The first condition is based on the premise that learning to read will be facilitated in direct proportion to the extent that the child can be helped to perceive the close relationship between his spoken language and the written language of the beginning reading materials. When applied to the area of beginning reading, this concept logically suggests utilization of the established speech patterns of the child in the beginning reading materials.

The second condition or premise underlying the theoretical rationale of the model is that at no time should the children be given the impression that the speech forms used in their oral speech are inferior forms of communication.

To render both of the foregoing conditions operational in the model, the everyday talk and school talk concept was employed. This concept helps the child to distinguish between his familiar oral language patterns and those of the standard dialect without designating one as inferior or superior. Since the child feels most comfortable in using the everyday talk patterns that are familiar to him, the initial emphasis was placed on having the child make the transition from the familiar everyday talk form to the unfamiliar school talk form. Those of us working on the project found that the children readily learned and enjoyed using the idea that the same communication can be stated in more than one way.

Having made the decision to utilize nonstandard speech patterns in the

beginning reading situation, the question arose as to what aspect of the nonstandard dialect should be emphasized in the materials. In listening to our children, we observed differences in vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical form. In considering these differences, we decided to focus only on the difference between the standard and the nonstandard that existed in the area of verb usage. The reasoning for this decision was that even if a standard pronunciation system could be identified and defended, it would not be pedagogically feasible to focus on this aspect of the standard dialect with primary-grade children. Also, even if it were possible and feasible to identify and teach a standard pronunciation to our primary children, it seemed to us that there is far more tolerance in our society toward regional variations in pronunciation than toward differences in verb usage.

The decision to focus on verbs as the only distinguishing variable between the nonstandard and the standard was also influenced by the fact that in many cases the transition from the nonstandard to the standard pattern could be made by adding to the nonstandard pattern.

Considerable research has been conducted with respect to the conditions in which prior learning interferes with the learning and recall of the new material. Hence, whenever possible, efforts were made to make the distinguishing variable between <u>everyday talk</u> and <u>school talk</u> one in which the transition from <u>everyday talk</u> to <u>school talk</u> could be made by adding to the <u>everyday talk</u> form.

<u>Development of experimental treatments</u>

To obtain information with respect to the two research questions previously mentioned, it was necessary to develop companion <u>everyday talk</u> and <u>school talk</u> stories. In accordance with the rationale of the study, the <u>school talk</u> stories would need to be the same as the <u>everyday talk</u> stories with the exception that the verb form would be changed to correspond to the standard English usage.

Ideas with respect to content and speech patterns needed to develop the everyday talk stories were obtained from tape recordings of conversations with several groups of kindergarten, first-, second-, and third-grade children attending several inner-city schools in Chicago.

The experimental everyday talk stories were developed, focusing on the particular verb forms that were found to appear frequently in the nonstandard form in the child's informal conversation.

The companion school talk stories were written, utilizing the same sentences in every respect except the verb form,which was changed to correspond to the standard English usage.

The experimental treatments were divided into eight units. The focus of each unit was placed on a particular verb form as follows:

	EVERYDAY TALK	SCHOOL TALK
Unit 1	Employs the verb got	Introduces the verb have
Unit 2	Absence of is and are	Introduces is and are
Unit 3	Absence of third person singular ending -s	Introduces the verb ending -s
Unit 4	Absence of -ed ending	Introduces -ed ending
Unit 5	Employs use of do	Introduces does
Unit 6	Employs use of be in place of am, is, and are	Introduces am, is, and are in place of be
Unit 7	Employs he be, we be and they be	Introduces standard forms he is, we are, and they are in place of he be, we be, and they be

The foregoing units have subsequently been expanded, field tested, and published. (Davis, Gladney, and Leaverton, 1968).

Grouping of students

To insure that groups were matched as closely as possible, the Wechsler

Intelligence Scale for Children was given to each of the 37 pupils in the experimental classroom. The students were representative of the school population as a whole with respect to ability. Scores were separated with respect to sex and ranked from highest to lowest total IQ. Proceeding from highest to lowest, each student was alternately assigned to one of two groups. For example, the highest ranking student was assigned to group 1, the second ranking student to group 2, the next to group 1, etc. This same procedure was used for both male and female students. After all assignments had been made, the experimental group was chosen by tossing a coin. A "T" value of the difference between means of the groups was then calculated and found to be not significant at the .01 level.

Presentation of treatments

Group 1 (the experimental group was given the everyday talk version of each story, and Group 2 (the control group) was given the school talk version of the same story. When, in the judgment of the teacher, half of the experimental group had reasonably mastered the everyday talk story, word recognition and phrase recognition tests were administered to both groups.

This measure was designed to test the first question, i.e., Will the children learn to read the everyday talk stories quicker than the school talk stories?

When, in the judgment of the teacher, approximately half of the experimental group were able to read the school talk story orally without mistakes, both groups were given word recognition and phrase recognition tests. The measure was designed to test the second question, i.e., Will learning to read the everyday talk story facilitate the learning of the school talk story?

This sequence was followed for each story included in the unit. Figure 1 illustrates the administration of the word recognition and phrase recognition tests.

	Story I		Story II		Story III		Story IV	
Group 1	ET	ST	ET	ST	ET	ST	ET	ST
Group 2	ST	ST	ST	ST	ST	ST	ST	ST
	T_1	T_2	T_1	T_2	T_1	T_2	T_1	T_2

Figure 1. Sequence of Administration of Treatments

ET - Represents the everyday talk story.

ST - Represents the school talk story.

T_1 - Represents the tests administered relative to Question 1.

T_2 - Represents the tests administered relative to Question 2.

Methods of evaluation

Word recognition and phrase recognition tests

Word recognition and phrase recognition tests were administered as described in the foregoing section.

Oral Review Tests

Oral review tests were administered at the completion of each unit. These tests utilized the same vocabulary included in the unit. The words and phrases, however, were rearranged to alter the content and meaning of each story. For example, the sentence "My Daddy is strong." might be changed in the oral review to "My Daddy is smart." The groups were compared with respect to 1) total mean errors (scoring adopted from Gray's Oral Reading Test), 2) errors on verb form only, and 3) time required to read the story.

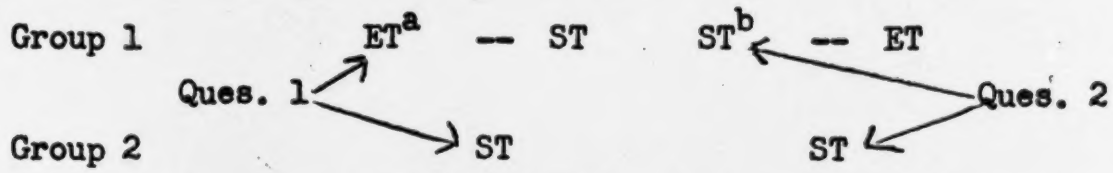

Figure 2 - Design Used in Administering the Oral Review Tests

a - ET represents one-half of Group 1 who read the ET review story first.

b - ST represents one-half of Group 2 who read the ST review story first.

Figure 2 shows the design used in administering the oral review tests. This design was used because in evaluating the second question, a practice effect would have been present if all of Group 1 read the everyday talk story first. This practice effect would result from the fact that in order to facilitate the administration of the oral review tests, the child was prompted after six seconds if he did not know a word. The following everyday talk story will serve as an example:

Stop That!

When I be talking my teacher say, "Stop that!"

When I be running my teacher say, "Stop that!"

When I be fighting my teacher say, "Stop that!"

No talking!

No running!

No fighting!

What a school!

Note that the only difference between the everyday talk and school talk is with respect to the verb forms be/am, and say/says. Hence, if in reading the everyday talk oral review story the child had been prompted on teacher, stop that, when, or talking, running, and fighting, he would have received practice effect on these words as they also appear in the school talk story.

Retention Tests

Approximately four to six months after both groups completed a unit, word recognition and oral review tests were administered to evaluate retention of the material that was previously learned.

Findings

Data were obtained and categorized with respect to the following variables:

1) Mean rank[2] and U score values with respect to the combined errors on word recognition and phrase recognition tests relative to both research questions being investigated. Values were obtained individually for each unit in the experimental materials.
2) "t" ratios were calculated for each unit comparing mean errors made by each group on the oral review tests.
3) "t" ratios calculated for each unit comparing mean errors made by each group on the oral review retention tests.
4) Mean rank and U score values with respect to errors only on the verb form on the oral review tests.
5) "t" ratios calculated from comparison of mean time taken to read the oral review and oral review retention tests relative to both questions being investigated.[3]

It was apparent from inspecting the mean errors and time taken to read the story on the oral review and retention tests that there was a definite trend in favor of the experimental group. To determine how often this trend could occur by chance, a chi square was calculated on the three variables evaluated by the oral review and oral review retention tests, i.e., 1) total mean errors, 2) mean errors on verb form, and 3) time taken to read story.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show the results of this analysis.

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[2]The scores for both groups were combined and ranked in order of increasing size. The sum of the ranks for the scores in each group (R_1 and R_2) was then obtained, and a mean for each sum was calculated.

[3]Detailed analysis of the findings from the comparisons cited above will be discussed in the author's forthcoming doctoral dissertation. Hence, only a summary of the findings will be discussed at this time.

TABLE 1

X^2 calculated from frequency that group mean for Group 1 was lower than that of Group 2 with respect to mean errors on the oral review and oral retention tests.

	Question 1[a]		Question 2	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
Observed	10	0	9	1
Expected	5	5	5	5
	DF = 1 X^2 = 8.10 P = .01		DF = 1 X^2 = 4.90 P = .05	

[a]Yates correction was used in calculating the X^2.

TABLE 2

X^2 calculated from frequency of occasions in which mean rank of Group 1 was lower than Group 2 with respect to errors only on the verb form on the oral review test and oral review retention test.

	Question 1[a]		Question 2	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
Observed	8	1	7	3
Expected	4.5	4.5	5	5
	DF = 1 X^2 = 4 P = .05		DF = 1 X^2 = .90 P = NS	

[a]Yates correction was used in calculating the X^2.

TABLE 3

X^2 calculated from frequency that group mean for Group 1 was lower than that of Group 2 with respect to time taken to read the oral review and oral review retention tests.

	Question 1[a]		Question 2	
	Group 1	Group 2	Group 1	Group 2
Observed	9	1	9	1
Expected	5	5	5	5
	DF = 1 X^2 = 4.9 P = .05		DF = 1 X^2 = 4.9 P = .05	

[a]Yates correction was used in calculating the X^2.

Implications for future research

As can be noted from the foregoing tables, the findings are positive. However because of the small number involved in this study, the results are inconclusive. A study is in progress whereby forty classrooms of children who started with te experimental materials in September 1969 will be compared with children in several other special reading programs for inner-city children in Chicago (Leaverton, 1971).

During the 71-72 school year, these children will receive the standardized reading test given to third-grade children in Chicago on a city-wide basis. In addition, we will have available results from all other tests given to the children since they entered school, i.e., IQ, reading readiness, etc. This will allow comparison of the reading achievement of the children in each program with respect to several variables.

Some variables within our program as they relate to reading achievement will also be investigated. For example, the data from the present study strongly suggest that this approach is especially effective with boys who scored in the lowest quartile on the reading readiness test administered at the beginning of first grade. The anticipated study will determine to what extent and under what conditions this possibility is verified.

Value

Possibly the most significant value of the language arts instructional model used in our research lies in the influence it has on the attitude and behavior of the teacher toward the children's oral speech. The traditional approaches to reading and oral language programs for the most part have not considered the possible negative effect that constant criticism of the child's

nonstandard speech patterns can have on the interaction between teacher and child and on the ultimate learning experience. It is possible that the difficulty that many of our children have in learning to read results in their resistance to a learning situation that belittles the speech patterns they have learned from their parents and community.

In using the model just described, the teacher is at no time required to criticize the oral speech of the children while they are beginning to read or during oral language arts activities. On the contrary, the model encourages the teacher to respect and accept the children's established dialect, and at the same time provide a framework to help the children learn to read and gradually and systematically to use standard English in their oral language activities. Hence, the model functions as a training program for the teacher as well as an instructional program for the children.

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